Meet Zach Cook

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Growing up in Cincinnati, Zach Cook played every sport imaginable except the one sport he plays at collegiate level now: baseball.

"I was really big on basketball and soccer, but in seventh grade, I decided to try something completely different and play baseball. I played three sports (baseball, basketball, football) all through high school, but baseball was my best talent and passion so I kept moving forward with it," Cook said.

Winthrop has been an academic trampoline for Cook, launching him to a degree in exercise science.

The 21-year-old junior intends to go to graduate school to earn a doctorate degree in physical therapy. Although Cook had heard of Winthrop, he didn't know much about it.

"Our coaching staff first saw me pitch in a tournament the summer of my sophomore year and then again in the summer of my junior year. They asked me to come for a visit, so I came. After seeing how nice the athletic facilities were and how gorgeous the campus was, I knew I had to commit to play here," Cook said.

That commitment has brought a lot of opportunities for Cook: making friends, improving his game, and having fun.

"After our Eagle Challenge event at the end of the fall every year, we have a team paintball outing. It's always a blast to get out there with everyone for a few hours and just have fun. Getting the chance to shoot paintballs at the coaches is always a good time too," Cook said.

Cook says team chemistry is off the charts this year, but that it isn't the only thing driving the team and bringing them together.

"We have a lot of senior leadership this year, including five fifth-year seniors. Last year we came so close to reaching a regional with a 40-19 finishing record, and coming up short like that put a bitter taste in everyone's mouth. The end result of last year is just used as motivation to get further than we did last year," Cook said.

That bitter taste has pushed himself and the team to work harder than ever this year. Some of that work goes into helping each person on the team stand out.

"When you're good in high school, you really stand out above everyone else. However, when you get to Division One baseball, everyone is good. It takes a lot of drive to have a good work ethic and place yourself above the talents of everyone else. It takes a lot how to figure out how to pitch to collegiate hitters vs. high school hitters," Cook said.

For the Eagle baseball team, every game is an opportunity to win and have some fun.

"Whether it's acting like clowns while cheering our team on or participating in shenanigans between innings down the right field line, we always have a great time at the ballpark," Cook said.

For Cook, playing baseball is about the teamwork and improving a little every game, as exemplified in his favorite game.

"Even though the end result wasn't what we were looking for, the game against Clemson this year has been my favorite so far. I had the opportunity to come in relief in the sixth inning and maintain our 3-1 lead all the way up until the last inning.

Photo courtesy of Mike Pawelczyk

Unfortunately in the last inning, some things did not go our way and they ended up walking off, but big stage games like that are always fun to play in. We as a collective whole that day played great, but the last inning just did not go our way," Cook said.

The baseball team will take on Radford at Eagle Field at 6 p.m. this Friday.

Light it up blue

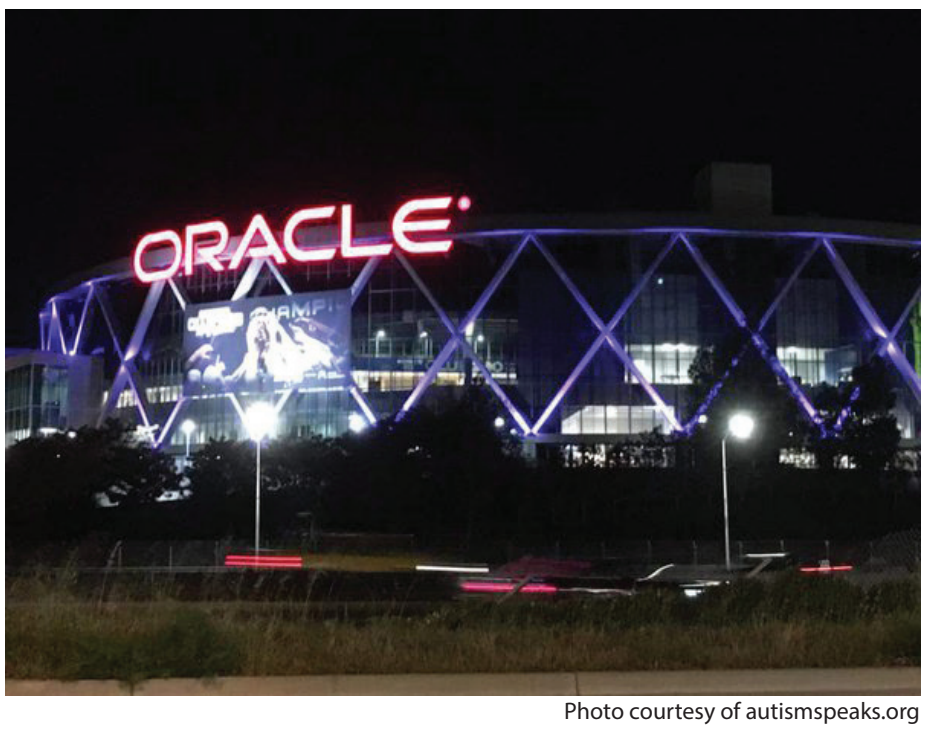

Photo courtesy of autismspeaks.org

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Autism is a brain development disorder that is present in children during the early stages of life.

To help the world become more aware of this disorder, the Autism Society has made the month of April Autism Awareness Month. Having awareness does not just happen on social media or by passing out flyers.

Autism awareness month also consist of the ability to reach people through the world of sports. Sports such as swimming, track and martial arts are all great for children that have autism because it allows them to be a part of an individual sport and gain better social and communication skills on a one on one basis with their coach.

Rather than playing a team sport that has complex rules, a child with autism may have difficulties in understanding the rules or struggle with communicating with other children on their team.

Autism awareness month is filled with many fun activities from 5k run/walks, Zumba and skating.

The awareness effort has even caught the eye of professional sports teams in the United States. The New York Red Bulls from major league soccer hosted an Autism Awareness Night on April 9 where a portion of ticket sales were donated to Autism Speaks.

The Red Bulls also set up a Quiet Zone in their arena for attendance members that have autism and need a break from the game can go and relax.

The NBA's world champions the Golden State Warriors also got involved with this cause as two teenagers last year went on the news to spread awareness and the Warriors saw it and decided to take action and have an autism awareness game.

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Also for the month of April, a major league baseball is teaming up with Autism Speaks.

All 30 MLB teams will be hosting an awareness game in the month of April or later in the season to raise awareness, and a fan fest from July 8-12 in San Diego will raise funds for Autism Speaks. April 2 was the eighth annual World Autism Awareness Day.

On this day the world used the hashtag LIUB or Light It Up Blue to light up over 11,000 buildings across the world blue to for Autism Awareness.

Some sports teams in the United States still continue to light up their stadiums blue for the whole month of April to show that the support of Autism last more than just one day.

Sports may fun to watch and play, but the athletes and personal of teams also use sports to change lives around the world.

M T W TR F S

IN SPORTS THIS WEEK

Baseball

4/13 @ 6 p.m.
Winthrop Ballpark

4/15 - 4/17
Winthrop Ball Park

Softball

4/15 - 4/16
Terry Field

Lacrosse

4/16 @ 1 p.m.
Eagle Field

Men's Tennis

4/13 @ 2 p.m.
Big South Championship

Women's Tennis

4/15
Big South Championship

Men's Golf

Big South Championship
4/17- 4/19
Ninety Six, SC

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